

Diseworth HERITAGE TRAIL



Introduction

The village of Diseworth is situated just south of the East Midlands International Airport. It retains a significant number of pre-20th century buildings, to which this leaflet provides a guide.

The Trail starts at The Cross, the crossroads at the centre of the village near the church. Diseworth is a name with Anglo Saxon origins - in the 9th century this area was part of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia and came under the Danelaw after AD 879. The recent discovery of a hoard of Roman coins and the survival of ancient track-ways point to the length of time there has been a settlement here. The village roads are all called 'Gate' - a word derived from Old Norse meaning 'the way to' - a survival from the period of the Viking occupation.

As you walk, note the massive walls of local stone which also form the lower courses of many of the older houses. All the old properties had their own well. The surrounding land is still mostly in agricultural use and there are working farms in the centre of the village. Until the early 20th century, Diseworth was largely self-sufficient, the various cottage industries, such as framework knitting and lace embroidering, being supported by a wide range of crafts and trades, from baker and wheelwright to cobbler and undertaker. There were also local brickworks and possibly a tannery.

The Parish Church

1



Any exploration of the village should start with the Church. Dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels, it has been here since Saxon times, as shown by traces of herringbone work in the walls, two early windows on the north wall of the chancel and 'long and short' work in the quoins of the NE corner of the nave. The large, plain, round font is also almost certainly Saxon. It is suggested that the dedication to St. Michael indicates that it had once been a sacred pagan site.

Most of the fabric dates from the 13th century though there have been several episodes of major restoration. In about 1220 the patronage of the church was given to the Prioress of nearby Langley Priory by Benedict de Diseworth. The original small Saxon chapel was much enlarged, in keeping with its new found status and the south aisle was added. The fine broach spire dates from this era.

Having fallen into disrepair in Tudor times after the Dissolution of the Priory in 1536, it was restored in 1661 after the Restoration of Charles II, when the porch was built and the, originally thatched, roof was leaded. Further major restoration and reorganisation took place in about 1900, and the roof timbers were replaced after the 2nd World War..

Beneath the nave is the vault of the Cheslyn family, who purchased Langley Priory in 1686. A large wall tablet lists those buried there. Members of the Shakespear family, who lived at Langley from 1853 to 1970, and were great benefactors to the church and village, are also commemorated, in particular by the beautiful chancel windows, which are by the notable Victorian designer C. E. Kempe.



The clock face was restored for the Millennium. Can you spot the mistake?

Land Ownership & the Christ's College Connection

Until the sale of the Shakespear Estate in 2010, Old Hall Farm, together with Cross Farm, and several outlying farms, represented a continuity of land ownership which stretched back to the mid 12th century. From about this time the land in Diseworth was divided between two main estates - that which was endowed upon Langley Priory in the 13th century, and that which was acquired by the Seagrave family at about the same time. The former became the Cheslyn and later the Shakespear Estate. The latter passed through the Mowbray and Howard Dukes of Norfolk, and was bought by Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, for the endowment of Christ's College, Cambridge. Christ's owned the land from 1506 until 1920, when the estate was broken up and sold. Langley Priory itself was sold with its surrounding parkland some years ago.

Location



Publications

Diseworth The Story of a Village. £8.00
The Baptist Church in Diseworth. £5.00
Diseworth, A History. £1.50
A History of Diseworth C of E Primary School. £1.50
William Lilly, Diseworth's Famous Son. £1.00
The Churches of Diseworth. £1.00

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Lilly's Cottage

7

Overlooking The Cross, at the entrance to Hall Gate, is one of Diseworth's most important buildings - Lilly's Cottage. This spectacular, half-timbered, thatched house was, in 1602, the birthplace of the infamous astrologer, William Lilly. It was rebuilt by his grandfather in the later 1500s, replacing a house which may have dated back to the 13th century - one of the old cruck beams remains in the wall between the main house and the slightly smaller-scale, brick-nogged wing at the eastern end. This style of close-studded timber construction is not typical of local 16th century buildings.



The original 'wind eyes', a row of small holes just below the thatch, can still be seen. Their purpose was to let smoke escape and they date from an era when houses were open to the roof and had a central open fireplace, not a chimney. Inside there are many interesting features, most notably the 17th century graffiti in the plaster of the passage between the two parts of the building. These include various astrological and geometric symbols, the outlines of hands, and of the Church, together with initials and the date 1692.

In Lilly's day it was part of a large farm, but much was lost when his father went bankrupt in 1620. At that point, Lilly left to seek his fortune in London and probably never returned.



In the 18th century it was home to a weaver, in whose room the earliest Diseworth Baptists met. In the 19th century it was the home of a family of blacksmiths and two old forges survived in the out buildings alongside the road.

Diseworth Heritage Centre

15

Walking down Lady Gate from The Cross one reaches the Diseworth Heritage Centre, originally the Baptist Church. In 2000 the building was severely flooded and the congregation was by then so small that the Baptist Union decided to sell it. The Diseworth Heritage Trust secured a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which enabled the building to

be restored to its present, immaculate state, serving the village as a small museum and venue for meetings, courses and exhibitions.

The first Baptists in Diseworth met in a room in Lilly's cottage, but by 1752 rented a plot of land on Lady Gate where they built a meeting house.

This land was bequeathed to them in 1774. The building was enlarged over the years, a schoolroom being added in 1824, and the burial ground also was extended. The gravestones provide an eloquent record of the stalwarts of the Baptist movement in the village over the ensuing years. The schoolmaster, Nathaniel Gayton, was Deacon for many years, taking services and conducting burials. The 2000 flood was only the latest of many, the dates of the worst being recorded in the brickwork of the boundary wall alongside the Diseworth Brook.

The Methodist Chapel

10

In 1799, only eight years after the death of John Wesley, the Methodists of Diseworth acquired a plot of land on Hall Gate in order to build a chapel. The existing barn, after modifications, was used as their chapel for many years - by 1829 they had a regular congregation of fifty. The foundation stones of the present building were laid early in 1887 and it was completed later the same year. For many years Methodism flourished and the chapel was the scene of concerts and tea-parties. There were many other social activities, including excursions. Sadly, by the Millennium, congregations were so small that the chapel was closed for worship, sold and converted into a dwelling.

Old Hall Farm

4



Near the top of Grimes Gate is Old Hall Farm. The farmhouse is imposing - double-fronted, gabled, stone-dressed, with chequered brickwork and a tiled roof. It was built in about 1690 - shortly after the Cheslyns acquired the estate, and replaced a much earlier building. Cross Farm, and other houses in the village were also rebuilt at this time. The adjoining barns, arranged around a large crew yard, are also of considerable interest architecturally. That nearest the road actually dates from 1692. All are half-timbered with square-framed panels with arch bracing. The panels have a variety of infill - brick, rough local stone covered with a plaster render, wattle and daub. The supporting timbers include some very primitive forms of cruck beam.



Cross Farm

6

Cross Farm, next to the Church, has a notable house of about 1700 with a double-gabled roof and cross-gables, decorative



chequered brickwork, two elaborate string-courses, well-defined window arches and imposing front door. Note the four 'blocked' windows on the east wall overlooking the churchyard. The farm also has a range of interesting old stone, brick and half-timbered barns, the largest of which has a very unusual internal timber frame supporting the roof.

Grimes Gate The Old School & White House Farm

5

In the 19th century the west side of Grimes Gate consisted of a series of farmsteads, beginning with Iron Farm, opposite Old Hall Farm. There were two more where the new Primary School, built in the early 1970s, now stands. The original Schoolmaster's House of 1862 survives. The old Parish



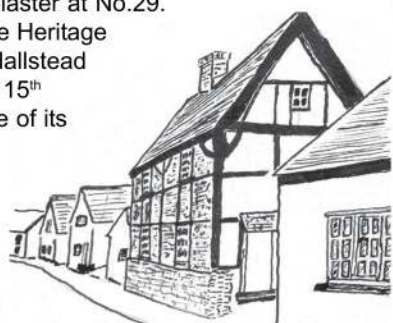
School adjoined this building and was built in the same style, with bricks supplied by the village brickworks. It replaced the small, private, endowed school on Clements Gate and was extended in the 1890's.

White House Farm, a 300-year old black and white, half-timbered house, was a working farm until the 1970s. Most of the internal timber survives and in the roof it can be seen that the building's origins go even further back – pieces of cruck frames from an earlier house have been used to construct the 'new' roof. This happened with many of the village houses – old cruck-framed, single-storey houses had new side and gable walls made in the newly developed square-framed style and the old crucks were simply hoisted up to support the new roof.



Hall Gate The Plough Inn to Hallstead Cottage

This stretch of Hall Gate contains some of the oldest buildings in the village. The Plough has soot-blackened cruck roof timbers that date from 1403. No.50 is dated CV 1692 – this being the date of its last rebuilding. Fascinating graffiti dating from the time of the Civil War were found carved into the plaster at No.29. They can be seen in the Heritage Centre. The thatched Hallstead Cottage is dated to the 15th century on the evidence of its timber framing.



Village Farm to Primrose Cottage

9 10

Beyond the bridge over the Diseworth Brook, is Village Farm. Now brick faced with stone footings, the gable end facing the road is the earliest part, originally of cruck construction. A half-timbered barn survives.



Opposite, next to the Village Hall is Hall Cottage. Stylistically this building is quite unlike anything else in the village. The lower courses and all of a massive chimney-stack are built of very high-quality, well-dressed stone. It is speculated that this stone came from the old Hall. This is Hall Gate, and we

are certain that there was a manor house on a site between here and 'Hall Close'.

Further on, to the south, was the old Woodyard, the site of a thriving local family business from the late 1800s until the 1990s. They did all kinds of carpentry, were wheelwrights, and, the village undertakers. Their lasting legacy to the village includes the new roofs throughout the church and many of its beautiful fittings. Only the 17th century house remains.



A barn at No. 13, contains examples of several forms of cruck beam which have been most beautifully conserved. Past the old Methodist Chapel is Chapel Farm, originally a three storey 18th century brick farmhouse, and beyond is Primrose Cottage. Once a row of three farm-workers' cottages, it has a timber frame with brick-filled panels under the render. Inside, some of the original wattle and daub survives. Opposite is a tiny, half-timbered, 17th century cottage.



The Bull & Swan & The Old Bakery

3



The Bull & Swan dominates The Cross as you look north and east. Previously known as The Bull's Head, the modern render conceals a large, old, timber-framed building, with brick infill to the square-framed panels. In the 19th century there were

stables in the yard at the rear, as this would have been an important coaching stop. Itinerant stallions were also quartered there on their progress round the country in the attempt to improve the quality of farm livestock.

Next door to the Bull & Swan is the imposing brick house that was for many years the site of the local grocer, bakery, general store and Post Office. Opposite is the Old Vicarage, which underwent a major renovation in 1836. It served as the Vicarage until the early 1980's, when it was sold by the Church Commissioners when the parishes of Diseworth and Long Whatton were amalgamated.



Clements Gate

2

Clements Gate has a number of old houses, many of which housed Framework Knitters in the 19th century. At the far end of the road are the traces of the last working brickworks in the village.



No. 9 is a house with a rich history. Until 1862 it was the site of a school, founded in 1744 by the endowment of William Lane and administered by the churchwardens who used one room as the Parish Room for their meetings. The last schoolmaster, Nathaniel Gayton, lived on here till his death in 1866, after which it was sold to a local farmer, one of whose sons ran a carting business from the premises. He was responsible for bringing in much of the material needed by the various cottage industries, such as cotton for stocking production, seaming and embroidering, and taking away the finished goods.

Lady Gate No. 6, 'The Old Forge'

16

Walking down Lady Gate from The Cross, you reach 'The Old Forge'. This low, thatched, building is the only one where cruck timbers can be seen externally. Craftsmen's marks can just be seen in the gable abutting the road. Against the south wall is an external oven, with an opening at the top for fuelling. The actual bread oven opens to the interior of the building. The house was originally part of a farm and only more recently the base of an itinerant blacksmith. On the other side of the brook are further old buildings, including Isley Farm and Lady Gate Farm, which dates from the 17th century.



The Town End Brickworks

14

The area at the end of Lady Gate is known as Town End. Ahead is a lane leading past the site of one of the village's two windmills to the old Glebe Farm at Longmere, almost in Belton. Some 40m along on the left is the one survivor of the several Clapper Bridges in the village. To the right stretches The Green. On the corner is a cottage with the initials GA 1776 worked into the brickwork. This commemorates George Adkin, who was then foreman of the brickworks on the opposite side of The Green. Behind the cottage at No. 80 was a huge pit, now filled in, from which the clay had been extracted over many years.



The Workhouse

13

At first glance, this seems an unlikely designation, but in small villages at the end of the 18th century, the Workhouse would not have been the forbidding Victorian building we now associate with the term. Before the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, villages were responsible for their own poor relief. Any suitable empty property might be used to house the sick or unfortunate. After 1834, unions of parishes were formed and Diseworth came within the Shardlow Poor Law Union.



The Sheepwash

12

At the western end of The Green is The Bowley, marked on old maps as a 'Bowling Alley'. Sadly, there are no folk memories of its use as such. Where this road crosses the Diseworth Brook and joins up with Hall Gate is the communal village Sheepwash.

The brook was dammed where it passed through the culvert under the road so as to form a large pool between the stone-built banks. Extra water could be released from the lake at Langley Priory if needed. Sheep were washed before being taken to



market, and dipped against vermin at other times. The sheep were driven into the water off the southern side. On the northern side is a ramp so that they could more easily get out after being washed.

Hall Close

11

On the sharp bend is the access to the field traditionally held to be the site of the Old Hall or Manor House of Diseworth. It does contain faint traces of earthworks. This would have been the Manor, referred to in a court case in the late 1400s, which became part of the lands with which Margaret Beaufort endowed Christ's College. William Lilly in his autobiography called it Hall Close and described the site in his day – c.1610, as having the ruins of a house, outbuildings, a dovecote and traces of fishponds near the brook.

On the south side of the field is Hallfield Farm, which may have been the home farm, rather than the Hall itself. Built into the stonework of the nearby barn is an old millstone. No record survives of a watermill in the village, but it did once have at least two windmills.

